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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5766
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000459

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/09/2023

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: UNAMI CHIEF ON ELECTIONS AND UPCOMING MEETING WITH
SISTANI

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: UNAMI Special Representative of the Secretary General to Iraq Staffan de Mistura told the Ambassador on February 15 that UNAMI's decision to assist the CoR in filling eight vacant Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) director positions, rather than firing all GEO directors and selecting replacements, was based on the press of time in preparing for upcoming provincial elections. He said UNAMI continues to believe that, with adequate supervision and technical assistance, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) can deliver a free and fair election. The Ambassador urged de Mistura to work closely with IHEC and all political parties to this end. De Mistura divulged that he will meet with Grand Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf on February 19 and may also have a meeting with senior Sadrists officials.

Noting that Sistani and the Marja'iyyah may lack accurate information about international community views and efforts, the Ambassador suggested that de Mistura explain UNAMI plans to support elections while attempting to establish a regular and reliable link of communication with Sistani or a designated interlocutor. The Ambassador asked de Mistura to convey to the Sadrists that we respect the Sadrists Trend and Sadr's decision to declare a ceasefire, and we urge the Sadrists to extend the ceasefire. End Summary.

Elections

12. (C) De Mistura explained that his February 14 decision to assist the CoR in selecting eight new GEO directors, rather than firing all GEO directors and starting anew, was taken in consultation with top CoR officials and political parties. While parties such as Fadhila, the Sadrists Trend, and the Iraq Islamic Party are not happy with this decision, he asserted, no party is so unhappy that they will try to block the process as they would have done in the event of wholesale GEO changes. He said the decision was based mainly on the relatively short time between now and October 1, the date fixed by the CoR as the latest possible election date. De Mistura said the eight new GEO directors would be selected in a transparent manner, adding that UNAMI has a clear idea of potential troublemakers among existing GEO directors and would be reviewing their professional qualifications and conducting additional supervision.

13. (C) After the Ambassador noted that Prime Minister Maliki, ISCI, and others continue to express concerns about the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), de Mistura said UNAMI continues to believe that, with adequate supervision and technical assistance, IHEC can deliver a free and fair election. He said the senior IHEC official (a Sadrists) who has drawn complaints from other parties is actually a competent worker, though UNAMI is watching him carefully. The Ambassador urged de Mistura to work closely with IHEC and all political parties to ensure a smooth and transparent electoral process, and to speak out publicly if necessary to

identify problem areas and those responsible.

Meeting Sistani and Sadrists in Najaf

14. (C) De Mistura divulged that he will meet with Grand Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf on February 19 and may have a separate meeting with senior Sadrists officials on the same day. The Ambassador observed that the USG and international community lack a regular and reliable means of direct communication with Sistani and the Marja'iyah, and hoped that de Mistura could establish a direct and regular channel with Sistani or a designated representative such as his son, Muhammad Ridha. This is particularly important, he continued, since Sistani and the Marja'iyah may lack accurate information about international community and USG views and efforts. The Ambassador suggested that de Mistura explain UNAMI plans to support elections that will address imbalances and reduce tension within Iraqi society, and urge Sistani to use his influence with parties to press for their assistance in ensuring a fair and violence-free election. He related that recent Sistani visitors such as President Talabani and Vice President Abdel Mehdi told us they had been scolded by Sistani and his cleric colleagues for the GOI's failure to deliver services or economic growth.

15. (C) De Mistura said that while he doubts he will meet with Muqtada al-Sadr in Najaf, he may be talking to some of Sadr's closest advisors, and the UNAMI chief asked for our input. The Ambassador asked de Mistura to convey that we respect the Sadrists' place in Iraq and want to establish a better mutual understanding. Furthermore, we respect Sadr's wise decision to declare a ceasefire last August and that Sadrists should understand that we have not sought to take advantage on the ceasefire by targeting Sadrists. Rather, we have

BAGHDAD 00000459 002 OF 002

targeted only those who have disobeyed the ceasefire order and showed their disloyalty to Sadr. No aim of the Sadrists' Trend will be advanced through a return to violence, he continued, and it is essential for Iraq that the ceasefire be extended.

CROCKER